

FITNESS

U.S. Population Parked on the Couch

Only about one fourth of U.S. adults meet recommended levels of physical activity - a statistic that has not changed since 1990, according to an analysis of 1998 data by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"There has been no improvement in the level of physical activity over the last 10 years. U.S. adults are not active enough to achieve health benefits," Sandra Ham, from the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, told Reuters Health.

"We were surprised to see this, especially since so much effort has been made over the past 10 years to increase physical activity," she added.

The 1998 data were derived from the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a state-based telephone survey of the U.S. adult population. Respondents were asked about the two physical activities or exercises they engage in most often and about the frequency and duration of each activity.

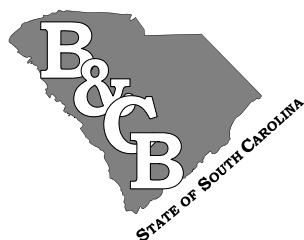
The percentage that engaged in the recommended levels of activity increased slightly from 24.3 percent in 1990 to 25.4 percent in 1998. In 1998, the number reporting insufficient activity was 45.9 percent, and the number reporting no physical activity was 28.7 percent, also similar to the 1990 findings.

"The components of recommended activity remained relatively stable," CDC researchers write in the March 9th issue of the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

According to the CDC survey, to have achieved recommended levels of physical activity, a person must have engaged in moderate-intensity physical activity at least five times a week for more than 30 minutes each time, or vigorous-intensity physical activity at least three times a week for 20 minutes or more each time, or both during the preceding month.

"Everybody needs to get more physical activity," Ham said. "Younger people are generally more active than older people, although the levels of physical activity are still pretty low, even among younger people," she noted, but added that more aggressive measures at the federal and state levels are needed to bring up physical activity levels.

SOURCE: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2001; 50:166-169.



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